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ABSTRACT

There has been little valid and reliable research of the motion picture audience. Specific reasons for the movie industry's own inattention to audience research include the early popularity of films and the fact that since the industry does not sell advertising it does not need to account for its audience size and preferences. Some researchers suggest that the artistic nature of film making and the industry's mistrust of researchers also account for the shortage. The fact that little audience research has been conducted by independent scholars and social scientists can be traced to at least six factors: (1) the notorious difficulty of access to facts about the secretive and insular film industry, (2) researchers' agreement with the film industry's assumption that each film presents a new problem and cannot be considered a typical product, (3) the difficulty or inability to attract funding for such work, (4) the vulgar associations attached to the newness and popularity of the cinema, (5) the feeling that what little there is to be said on the sociology of cinema is trite or well known, and (6) widespread research attention directed at television at the expense of movie research. Whatever the reasons for this shortage, and these suggested are not conclusive, there is clearly a need for such research in the areas of antecedent conditions to movie attendance, contexts of the movie experience, public preferences for movie genres, and attitudes toward motion pictures. (HTH)

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THE MOTION PICTURE AUDIENCE:

A NEGLECTED ASPECT OF FILM RESEARCH

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THE MOTION PICTURE AUDIENCE: A NEGLECTED ASPECT OF FILM RESEARCH

As an object for scholarly inquiry, the motion picture medium has historically drawn considerable research attention from historians, aestheticians, and students of law and technology. Research studies from these various disciplinary perspectives are justified as being needed for the individual wishing to gain a fuller understanding of cinema. For instance, one might validly argue that it is, prima facie, "natural" to study the creators -- the filmmakers -- of motion pictures; and even the most cursory search of the literature reveals a plethora of such work. Moreover, the history and development of the motion picture medium has been well-documented, as have a variety of legal issues.[1] Somewhat surprising, however, is the paucity of valid and reliable research of the recipients -- the consumers -- of motion pictures. Leaving, for the moment, the purposes and goals of social science aside, it seems intuitively reasonable to presume that the "manufacturers" of the "commodity" would for, if no other reason, economic motives, be keenly interested in such research to maximize profits. A second intuitively sensible assumption, again based upon financial motivation, would be that the world's largest and most prolific film producers -- Hollywood -- should be among the most attentive, encouraging, and supportive patrons -- if not initiators -- for film audience studies. Historically, and contrary to intuition, however, this was not the case. After a half a century of existence and popular acceptance, the powers in Hollywood were, for the most part, antagonistic toward and showed disdain for audience research. As Handel recounts: "In

1942 there was only a handful of persons who did not reject film research outright. Most condemned it without trial even though research was an established and useful part of other businesses."[2] Contemporaneously, Lazarsfeld, writing from the perspective of social science research, noted that "mere descriptive audience research has not developed so much with movies as with the other media."[3] Handel was to reiterate his and Lazarsfeld's point again in 1953: "Audience research is well entrenched in all media of mass communications except the film."[4] Today, the state of the art in film audience research has perhaps been best summarized by Simonet: "Motion picture audience research has been growing as a science from humble beginnings to more grandiose beginnings. But it seems always to have been making beginnings."[5]

The purposes of this paper are twofold: first, to enumerate, document, and sort-out the variety of reasons -- although in many instances "excuses" might be a better term -- historically offered about why film audience research has not been conducted; second, to suggest some specific research directions for film audience research. Preceding these discussions a brief rationale detailing the importance of film audience research will be presented.

Guback has written that "the literature about film deals overwhelmingly with surface phenomena" and that "this situation hardly contributes to a comprehensive understanding of what film is all about." He makes a compelling case for an "institutional approach" to film research; such an approach "analyzes the economic and industrial structures and arrangements involved in cinema, and the means by which information and entertainment are processed and allocated as commodities." The material discussed in the present

paper, as will be seen, dovetails with and complements Guback's argument, albeit from a somewhat different point of view: whereas the institutional approach Guback outlines "explains the way a society organizes the production and distribution of its entertainment and information,"[6] here the discussion is centered on the consumption process of such entertainment and information by various audience aggregates. Thus, the consumption process -- in the broadest sense of the phrase -- can be seen as an important and necessary correlate to the organizational aspects of motion pictures. In fact, it can be asserted, these two approaches are clearly not mutually exclusive and are separated at the present only for purposes of analytical clarity; future research will -- or least should -- be directed at a synthesis of the institutional and consumptional literature.

I: Why Study the Film Audience?

Systematic study of the film audience properly, but not necessarily exclusively, falls within the purview of social scientists trained in such academic disciplines as communications, psychology, and sociology, among others. While social scientists, enamored with the other major media of mass communications, have consistently and prolifically gone about the business of conducting studies resulting in the compiling of encyclopedic volumes devoted to the audience for the medium of their interest, the research field on film audiences is largely unexplored. The mass communications student in search of audience analysis for any of the contemporary mass media but one -- motion pictures -- is faced (perhaps intimidated would be a better term in some instances) with formidable and seemingly never-ending card catalogue drawers, journal articles, convention papers, books, and governmental literature. Film audience researchers, on the other hand, typically find themselves inundated with a veritable forest

of verbiage, little of which is theoretically and methodologically systematic, coherent, or valid. The dearth of published empirical data on the film audience is clearly illustrated by a recent comprehensive bibliography of such research which reported only 132 entries since 1960.[7] Although the quantity of studies might seem impressive, it is hardly so when considered from the perspective of a medium with a nearly one hundred year history.[8]

The title of this paper implies that the study of film audiences is in some way a useful activity and therefore in need of research attention. Perhaps, it might be argued, such research is neither useful nor meaningful and hence there lies the explanation for the scarcity of such work. Thus, to introduce this discussion, attention must be paid to assertions of this nature.

Historically one would think that A. O. Tate's published regret at not having noted even the name of the first kinetoscope patron on April 6, 1894 ought to have served as an impetus for related research endeavors.[9] Such was not to be the case. Systematic analysis of the early film audience would, today, be useful insofar as it would provide baseline data upon which a multitude of future comparisons might have been made; this, as with other historically-based arguments, is abundantly clear given the lucidity of 20-20 hindsight. Succinctly stated, we have a sharp picture of the industrial and technological development of the medium while, comparatively, the development and growth of the medium's audience is, at best, a fuzzy, soft-focus image characterized by armchair philosophy and (often apocryphal) reminiscence.

A second important reason for studying film audiences is the amount of money consumers spend on movies. The most currently available and complete data (1976) show that, while motion pictures account for only

4.12% of the total U.S. recreational expenditures, they are responsible for an astonishing 53.36% of the total U.S. spectator amusement expenditures[10]— this despite the availability of a variety of alternative leisure time spectator choices. The popularity of movies, then, as measured by recreational expenditures, warrants research attention.

Third, although movies account for more than half the recreational dollar, U.S. cinema attendance has dramatically declined over the years: What factors explain this? A brief example illustrates the importance of and one possible answer to this question. In 1930 the U.S. had a population of slightly more than 123 million[11] and an average weekly film attendance of 90 million.[12] 1930 was also the year in which the first study of attitudes toward movies was reported.[13] Results of the early attitude research showed that patrons held favorable attitudes toward the medium.[14] In 1970 the total U.S. population had grown by 65% to 203 million[15] while the average weekly film attendance had dropped by 83% (since 1930) to 15 million.[16] Concurrent with the declining weekly admissions were less favorable attitudes toward motion pictures. One reason why the average U.S. weekly movie attendance has plummeted by more than half in the space of 40 years may be the shift in movie-goers' attitude toward the medium; unfortunately, the study of peoples' attitudinal inclination toward movies has been virtually neglected and hence the above argument's credibility and comprehensiveness suffers.[17]

Fourth, and closely related to the point made above, in spite of the precipitous decline in attendance over the years, box office records continue to be broken annually by a few films, inflation notwithstanding. This observation suggests the hypothesis that while movie attendance generally has diminished, there continues to exist what Jarvie has labeled

"the special occasion audience": normally infrequent film-goers who attend only selected productions.[18] The composition of this audience and the motivational factors accounting for their attendance in such tremendous numbers at films such as Star Wars ($175 million) or The Empire Strikes Back ($120 million)[19] beg for scholarly scrutiny yet have been neglected.[20]

Thus, in summary, it has been suggested above that, if carefully and systematically conducted, movie audience research offers the potential for important historical and behavioral explanations regarding large audiences and their interaction with a popular mass medium. Clearly, the brief rationale presented here for investigating the film audience should be viewed as heuristic rather than definitive: a multitude of other reasons, of equal or greater importance, might also be suggested. Perhaps a final comment to the question "Why study the film audience?" is: to provide an accurate accounting, grounded in theory, of the film-goers' motives for attendance, the gratifications they derive from the movie experience, and the effect of movies on audiences.

II: Reasons for the Dearth of Data on Film Audiences

In his first annual report to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in 1946, MPAA president Eric Johnson stated that "The motion picture industry probably knows less about itself than any other major industry in the United States."[21] Given the industry's own lack of knowledge about itself, Garrison's statement that "very little information has been made public about the post-television movie audience" seems a foregone conclusion.[22] In 1944 Mae D. Heuttig wrote that Hollywood has shown "A great reluctance to disclose factual information with respect to its operations" and she raised a number of questions concerning the industry as a business and the composition of its patrons. Huettig concludes that "There are few reliable statistics available (and none of these

compiled by the industry itself) with regard to these questions."[23] While reasons and explanations for what appears to be Hollywood's almost xenophobic attitude toward external examination and research will probably remain at the level of speculation and conjecture, Lincoln may have inadvertently tapped a responsive chord when he wrote that "The movie industry is notorious for its lack of accurate statistics."[24] (It should be noted that for Huettig and Lincoln's discussion of "statistics" the term "research studies" may be justifiably substituted.) That there has been little film audience research conducted -- either internally (i.e., by the industry itself) or externally (i.e., by independent researchers) -- is, by now, a well-established fact. Thus, this portion of the paper will address itself to offering answers to the following questions: Why has there been so little research on the movie audience? What reasons have been offered to explain this? How valid are these reasons?[25] These questions will be approached from two perspectives, the industry's and the independent scholar's. That is, why has both Hollywood and the social science community been reluctant to examine the movie audience?

The Industry and Audience Research

To assert absolutely that Hollywood has completely ignored researching its audience would be in error. Ramsaye recounts an anecdote involving Carl Laemmle who inauspiciously began his film career conducting "field studies" of the audience for Hale's Tours:

> For two days the little man from Oshkosh [Laemmle] stood down in State Street, [in Chicago] moving just enough to keep from being conspicuous, while he counted the attendance that went in to see Hale's Tours pictures. When he got through he had an accurate notion of what kind of people

> went to see the pictures, what hours of the day they found the time to do it in, and how many of them there were per hour and per day.[26]

In a similar vein is Hampton's discussion of the development of the film exchange system which:

> established a route of communication from audience through exhibitor to distributor and producer, enabling the nickelodeon patrons to make their wishes known to the makers of pictures. If spectators enjoyed a film and applauded it, the nickleodeon owner scurried around and tried to get more like it, and if they grumbled as they left the show he passed on the complaints to the exchange, and the exchange told the manufacturer.[27]

The initial forays by industry-connected individuals into the field of audience research, however, were obviously little more than shots in the dark. Columbia Pictures' Harry Cohn's reputed use of his seat-of-the-pants methodology,[28] Mack Sennett's personalized "laughter scale,"[29] and Albert Sindlinger's "bugging" of the restrooms of the theaters he operated with porters who would ask patrons questions about the picture currently playing,[30] - all offer little in the way of external validity. Nevertheless, examples of studio bosses who considered themselves as representative of the audience for their pictures is, by now, the stuff of which legends are made[31] and, in a certain sense, understandable. In the early 1900s, the medium, industry, and audience for the medium were all new and thus the initial confusion and uncertainty among producers, which resulted in their extrapolating of their own responses to that of their audience, can be seen as a means by which (reasonable) fears of financial failure were offset.

Such fears were compounded by what appeared to be an extraordinarily fickle audience. Hampton suggests that "the orgy of extravagance that obsessed the studios from 1922 until 1927, when talking pictures wrought a fresh revolution," in confluence with the public's "broadening of tastes, noticeable after Armistice Day," together created an audience film-preference climate so unpredictable for producers that "a blind guess seemed to be as effective in predicting results [of the public's attraction to various film genres] as the most careful and intelligent analysis."[32] It was this combination of rapid technological and social change that, according to Jacobs, caused the genesis of the "'cycle' in motion pictures, the unit of which was the 'formula' picture" as a means to at least reduce uncertainty if not ensure "sure-fire" hits.[33] And, with this rise of the formula film, it is reported, came a modicum of interest, if not sophistication, in marketing analysis:

> Movies were analyzed for the following selling points: (1) "Names" -- that is, stars; (2) "Production Value" — elaborate sets, big crowds, and other proofs of great expense; (3) "Story Value" -- the huge price paid for the original and its great reputation as a novel or play; (4) "Picture Sense" -- a conglomeration of all these items; (5) "Box Office Appeal" -- plenty of all the standarized values which had proved successful in years past.[34]

Unfortunately, and perhaps due to Hollywood's doctrine of secrecy, film historians have not recounted the methodologies (never mind the results) used in these analyses with any precision. By and large, such historical accounts are anecdotal in nature and are usually presented to illustrate some point other than a film audience research perspective. Thus, we learn that Harry Rapf, when he

was production manager at Selznick-Select and Warner Brothers,

> often authorized his chauffeur to invite amature critics to express opinions on new films and the chauffeur's committee consisted of carpenters, electricians, the studio barber, the young interne in charge of the hospital, the gate-keeper, the gymnasium masseur, and their wives and children. Harry Rapf, regarding this audience as fairly representative of average theater patronage, frequently made changes to win its approval, with gratifying box-office results.[35]

In this passage we have been offered a glimmer of insight, but little of substance, about early attempts at pretesting of movies.

In summary, while it would be inaccurate to assert that Hollywood has entirely dismissed or disdained audience research, it may be stated that neither Hollywood nor film historians have been very helpful in detailing what was done or what was found in the way of film audience analysis.[36] One industry insider summarized "Commercial Practices in Audience Analysis" within the film colony this way:

> . . . we have usually worked in the past on the thesis that if we stand in the dark and throw a rock and hear a crash, we've hit the greenhouse. This is not an altogether dependable method. It means that if you don't hear a crash, you may no longer be in the motion picture business.[37]

Specific reasons for the industry's own inattention to audience research have been detailed by several authors and will be summarized here. One popular explanation, noted by several scholars, is that since the film industry does not

sell advertising, "it does not need to account to anyone for the size of its audience."[38] Thus, unlike the broadcast or print media, measurement of the effects and effectiveness of the film medium as a tool for selling a product is superfluous. The validity of this reason, of course, may be differentially assessed depending upon the terms by which the purpose of cinema is conceptualized: e.g., as an art form designed to bring aesthetic enjoyment to viewers, as a business designed to bring maximal return on investments, as a medium designed as an outlet for the creative energies of artists.

The early popularity of films is another frequently mentioned reason for the industry's lack of research:

> The young industry, which could readily finance research projects, found little motivation to do so because the new, expanding market was active enough to provide a highly satisfactory volume of business for the leading firms. Most motion picture executives were content to let product improvement and sales policies rest on their intuitive insight of what the public wanted, rather than on direct contact with the consumer.[39]

Thus, in essence, it is argued that a sense of complacency was encouraged and reinforced by virtue of a long-lasting period in which films were a seller's market: with people attending the movies in droves, the industry assumed a "who cares why they go" posture.[40] The weakness of such a line of reasoning, as history would later show, was its short-sightedness: the presumption of an ever-increasing, or at least stable, movie audience, coupled with either ignorance of, or refusal to acknowledge, the possibility of other competitive media

(e.g., broadcasting), among other things,[41] were to prove the flimsiness of this rationale.

Handel has asserted that "Hollywood, by and large, resisted the development of high-level audience research" and suggests that the most frequently heard reason for this was that "movie making is basically an artistic endeavor." He quickly dismisses this reasoning as so much fluff by stating: "We would gladly accept this statement if the same people did not tell us, after turning out a series of utterly commercial cliche pictures without batting a solitary eyelash, that movie making is just a business like any other."[42]

Lazarsfeld and Handel suggest that industry executives feared and distrusted researchers which, consequently, led to their avoidance of audience research. Lazarsfeld only states that "the executives in the movie industry are probably more individualistic and more distrustful of systematic research than those in any other communication industry."[43] Handel offers the explanation for this distrust: "Some movie makers misinterpret the function of audience research. They see in it not an instrument for their use, but a substitute for executive acumen."[44] Fear of usurpation by researchers among industry executives, however, was not necessarily unfounded. For instance, in the 1940s, Gallup's Audience Research, Inc.'s

> account executives . . . tried to assume too large a status within the organizations they served. Instead of advising what decisions might be taken as a result of the audience studies, they often told the industry executives what to do.[45]

Nevertheless, short-sightedness, again, and an unprofessional approach to business are factors militating against whole-hearted acceptance of the cogency of this argument for the lack of research.

Yet another reason for the industry's failure to pursue audience research has been offered by Handel:

> the industry still clings to some archaic methods of measuring audience reaction, such as uncontrolled sneak previews, preview cards, too much reliance on fan mail, and naturally, the mystic "feel" of the market which seems to reach its heights of potency in the air-conditioned private dining rooms of Bel Air and Miami Beach.[46]

This is less a reason and more an excuse: industry laziness and inertia cannot be held as a sound reason justifying the virtually total neglect of audience research.

Finally, Lazarsfeld has written that "the assumption has been that each film presented a new problem, and could not be considered a typical product "[47] -- hence the paucity of research. This statement has several implications. First, it is assumed that research results gathered from the study of any single film and its audience cannot be generalized to the next feature that unspools; i.e., every picture has to be sold and researched independently.[48] Yet this belies the notion that

> in a business in which hunches often carry more weight than demographic research, the box office record of a particular kind of film in a specific theater usually determines the releasing pattern for most future films.[49]

Moreover, given the absence of research this assumption can be neither supported nor refuted. Second, the "uniqueness assumption" is related to the short "shelf life" of motion pictures; the average exhibition run of any given film in any given locale is from three to five weeks. If audience research is constrained to a picture-by-picture basis, then the utility of such research may not be

justifiable given its cost. Again, however, these assumptions have not been tested. Third, the "uniqueness assumption" may be seen as a direct cause for the lack of general audience research:

> Determining who might comprise the audience is basically a back-burner project. Since it is not associated with a specific film, its lack of urgency causes it occasionally to get lost in the shuffle.[50]

Basically, then, this final argument for the industry's avoidance of audience research can be seen as tautological: film audience research cannot be conducted in a general sense (or the value of such research would be minimal) since the "product" is unique and the uniqueness of the product, together with its short shelf life, makes such research of limited value. In short, research has been traditionally neglected since its benefits have not been revealed --or, perhaps more accurately, given a chance to be revealed.

Social Science and Audience Research

The preceding section has attempted to sort out, summarize, and evaluate reasons why the film industry has performed so little audience research. In this section, the focus of analysis shifts to the independent scholar and the social science community: again the question is, why has film audience research been largely neglected?

Denis McQuail, in his introductory note to Franklin Fearing's article on the "Influence of the Movies on Attitudes and Behavior," which was originally published in 1947, states that "the fact that it still reads so freshly is also a measure of how little cumulative knowledge we have yet."[51] The fact that social scientists have long overlooked

the motion picture medium as an object for audience research cannot be doubted. As has already been noted, published empirical studies in professional journals on the film audience since 1960 are in scant supply. To take another example we can examine what has been collected on film audiences in book form. Sterling and Haight[52] present tabular data (drawn from other sources) describing "Characteristics of Motion Picture Audiences." Most film history books offer a brief discussion of the film audience -- especially from the developmental point of view -- although such presentations are, by and large, cursory and global in scope. Jowett's Film: The Democratic Art[53] provides the most current and comprehensive source for film audience research in book form. Yet even here, in this 461 page work, only 46 pages (as itemized in the index under "audiences") -- or 10% -- are devoted to the topic of audiences. Moreover, Jowett's discussion of one "Special Study" of the film audience contains an error of omission which leaves the reader with an incorrect reason for why people go to the movies.[54] Jowett aside, few books exist for the film audience researcher who wishes to uncover empirical evidence. In terms of books which focus exclusively on the film audience the most recent title is Handel's 1950 work, Hollywood Looks at Its Audience.[55] Thus, regardless of where one searches -- books or periodicals -- one finds little film audience research conducted by independent scholars.

The reluctance shown by mass communications and other scholars to investigate the motion picture audience may be traced to at least six factors. One frequently voiced reason offered for the scarcity of film audience research by independent scholars is the "notorious difficulty of access to facts about the film industry which is secretive and insular."[56] Lazarsfeld wrote that independent researchers do not and cannot gain access to box office returns data, which therefore "makes it understandable that mere descriptive audience research has not developed so

much with movies as with the other media."[57] Thus, it is argued, although at present film audience research is known to take place -- primarily by the marketing departments of the major film producer - distributors -- these data remain proprietary[58] and hence conceptual and theoretical advances are stymied by the lack of any clear-cut directions from an existing body of knowledge. On the other hand, this same reason ought to challenge the inquisitive scholar to begin vigorous investigations; for clearly such research would not, as the saying goes, be "reinventing the wheel," since this wheel is a well-kept secret. Furthermore, while box office data may be of importance for some film audience research projects, it is certainly not the sine qua non or germane for most audience research which uses the social science lens to focus on the phenomenon. Motivational research, to take one example, would do better to employ such constructs as frequency of attendance and the importance respondents assign movie-going as a leisure activity in their theoretical and research designs than box office or rental data. Lastly, complaints that the movie audience research field lacks -- or is being deprived of -- theoretical underpinnings and guidelines are flimsy excuses for lazy scholars; at some point in time every research area suffered this same situation.

The film industry's assumption, presented above, that "each film presented a new problem, and could not be considered a typical product"[59] may also have been a priori endorsed and adopted by the social science community, thereby causing researchers to neglect the field of film audience research in favor of other media audiences. If the "uniqueness assumption" is valid, scholars might be justified in arguing that the traditional predictive and explanatory functions of theory (including the process of theory-building) would be inoperative. However, as was noted earlier, the validity of this assumption has yet to be demonstrated. Moreover, the research interests and purposes of the film industry are not aligned with

those of independent scholars: industry research may be broadly described as attempting to answer one question "How can any given picture best be marketed so as to achieve a profitable return on investment?"; social scientists, on the other hand, should approach the film audience with an interest that extends beyond the simple unidimensional one-film behavioral perspective; social science research can and should address itself to broader cognitive, affective, and behavioral issues, their interrelationships, and the search for explanations of these issues as applied in a theoretical sense.

A third reason offered by some writers for the noninvolvement of independent scholars in film audience research is the difficulty or inability to attract commercial, governmental, or foundation funding for such work.[60] The assertion that financial support might be hard to come by for film audience studies may have an element of truth. Compared to other mass media, the film medium's lobbying and self-regulatory organization (the Motion Picture Association of America) has neither offered the opportunity for, nor sought out, nor provided financial support for, independent research; conversely, both the National Association of Broadcasters and the American Newspaper Publishers Association -- regardless of what might be their self-serving motives -- have helped to foster and promote audience research for their media through grants to scholars. In 1946, "fact-minded" MPAA president Eric Johnson[61] established a Department of Research within the MPAA that might have led to the potential for involving independent scholars at some later time. Handel has stated that this Department had among

its objectives "to eliminate the guesswork which had characterized industry statistics" and "to engage in research projects designed to furnish the industry with scientific data as a basis for the formation of policy."[62] The Department was short-lived, however, as the member companies of the MPAA did not approve a key research project advocated by Johnson[63] and "the research committee, after sponsoring some minor interindustry statistical studies, discontinued its activities."[64] However, even though there has been little financial support for film audience research, this still does not justify the inattention among independent scholars. While research can be costly, it is still possible even without external funding. Moreover, one would suspect that funding would be easier to attain -- especially from research foundations and the industry -- if one has a "track record" of such research.

Jarvie has written that two reasons why the social dimensions of motion pictures have been paid such brief research attention are: (1) "vulgar associations attached to the cinema, partly due because of its very newness and popularity, [and (2)] the feeling that what little there is to be said on the subject of the sociology of the cinema is trite and/or well-known."[65] The vulgarity argument may have held sufficient power in the early days of the movies to detract research attention but this has doubtful, or at least limited, explanatory power. Myriad reports in the popular press[66] concerning the vulgarity, uncivilized, morally-threatening, and low-brow nature of the movies, as published in the early 1900s, can also be seen as acting as a catalyst to

film audience research. Perhaps the best example in support of this is the Payne Fund studies. As Sklar has written, the initiator of the project, William A. Short, the reform and pro-censorship minded director of the National Committee for Study of Social Values in Motion Pictures, shaped the project "from the beginning by his special needs and goals: to get the goods on the movies, to nail them to the wall."[67] Today the cinema has reached and generally been accorded the status of at least a mid-level art form, thereby removing the stigma and obstacle for researchers. (Television has had the dubious distinction of usurping not only a large chunk of the cinema audience but also the pejorative aspects of the cinema's reputation.) The weakness of the triteness or well-knownness argument lies in its assumption of a static industry, society, and audience.

The last explanation for the cold shoulder given to film audience research by social science to be advanced here suggests that the rapid and widespread diffusion and adoption of television, beginning in the early 1950s, "stole" whatever research interest might have been directed at the movies. Just as it has been shown that TV affected cinema attendance,[68] it is not coincidental that TV also affected social science research activity. That is, had the introduction of television come later, Handel's 1950 Hollywood Looks at Its Audience might now be viewed as the harbinger of an active research inquiry by independent scholars into the film audience field rather than the dying gasp of an unfashionable field presently of interest to, only antiquarians. Television is, of course, a particularly attractive medium for

audience research for many obvious and legitimate reasons. What is suggested here, though, is that TV's ubiquity and accessibility to both audiences and researchers makes it a compellingly convenient medium (in contrast to motion pictures) to "do" research on. Simply put, film audience research isn't "where it's at," in part, because it is (or is perceived as being) less convenient, more difficult, and more time-consuming than television audience research. The pervasiveness of television, coupled with the public's attention to and appetite for the medium, is somewhat reminiscent of the pre-television motion picture audience; and perhaps recognizing the neglect it had shown the field of movie audience research, the social science community was quick to avoid making the same mistake with television. In any case, television audience research, while providing much needed information, may have also functioned -- inadvertently maybe -- to redirect the course of research away from the movie audience.

III: Four Areas for Further Research

Given the rather unstructured and unfocused state of the existing body of film audience literature, numerous diverse research endeavors could be enumerated for the future. This section will be selective, however, in its suggestions for such future film audience research studies: presented here are four areas in need of research attention. These particular areas for discussion were selected for primarily theoretical reasons.

Antecedent Conditions to Movie-Going

Several studies have inquired as to the salience individuals attribute to a number of film-specific variables which, in turn, may help to determine their particular movie-going experience.[69]

Most studies of this nature have found that respondents evaluate subject matter as the most important factor in determining whether or not to see a movie and, conversely, behind-the-screen production personnel (e.g., producer, director, screenwriter) as the least important. In addition to this research on the importance of various variables in the film choice decision process, it has long been recognized that contemporary movie-goers are far more selective in their film attendance behavior than were their counterparts when the medium was at its height in popularity. The findings of several reports[70] support the concept of a discriminating audience: for most individuals, movie-going appears to be a directionally specific activity; people go to a movie, not the movies. Thus, we have some insight as to the salience and predictive capacity of a host of variables as they relate to a specific film-going experience once an individual has decided to attend a movie (as opposed to engaging in some other activity). This body of research presumes that the decision to alter existing activities -- either immediately or sometime in the future -- had already been reached by the individual. What this literature has not attempted to analyze is a central motivation theory question: What specific conditions determine how an individual initially becomes motivated to engage in movie-going as an activity? In other words, what is it about motion pictures -- or a particular motion picture -- that gives rise to an individual's change of behavior?

Movie audiences, their behavior, and their motives for their

behavior, represent an interesting phenomenon from points of view of the leisure activity and consumption. Movies are a consumer product, unlike many other products, that do not offer "trial-ability." Also, the film consumer typically enters into a "consumption agreement/situation" with little precise knowledge of the commodity itself; while the form is perhaps familiar, the exact content remains enigmatic. Further, with movies, unlike other consumer products, few "repeat purchases" (i.e., attendance) of the same product (i.e., movie) are likely to occur. Additionally, movie selection and attendance is a costly commitment in terms of time, finances, and effort (i.e., one goes to a movie as opposed to sitting down to watch TV). Moreover, the "uniqueness assumption," discussed above, postulates that each movie is a product unlike other products within the same class and has unique characteristics. Thus, while a facial tissue is pretty much the same whether the brand name is Kleenex, Scott, or generic, the same cannot be said for motion pictures. If there are key differences between films, which may exert differential influences in terms of motivation and decision-making, as the uniqueness assumption would hypothesize, these differences would tend to limit the generalizability of the results of individual movie motivational research studies. Finally, the most common attendance unit is the couple (as opposed to either going alone or as part of a large group). This, therefore, might tend to affect the attendance decision and specific film to be attended processes; such processes might involve exponentially larger numbers of variables simply by one or more additional persons entering into the decision

process. It may be that such involvement is in some cases direct (e.g., such as through verbal discussion) or indirect (e.g., such as one individual planning attendance in view of such considerations as appropriateness for dating activities and the needs, desires, and preferences of the other).

All of the points raised above presently exist at the level of speculation. While conjecture may be cognitively stimulating, research studies need to be designed to begin to address these issues for purposes of theory-building.

Contexts of the Movie Experience

Movie-going is not an isolated activity. Regardless of whether the individual elects to attend alone or in the company of others, the physical ambience of the theater, the form of exhibition, and a host of other factors may play important roles in determining not only attendance decisions but also the film experience itself. Just as one would not attempt to interpret, in any meaningful and valid sense, nonverbal communicative behavior without the benefit of context, so too film audience research needs to consider and address the role of varying contexts of the movie experience.

Intuitively it makes sense to assert that motives for attendance and gratifications derived (to name but two possible research directions) will vary depending upon different film contexts. But the present state of the art in audience research has, by and large, remained at the intuitive level. Whatever the benefits of intuitively appealing exegeses, they are no substitute for systematically

conducted research. Armchair philosophy needs to be supported or refuted on the basis of empirical reality.

One context in need of audience research attention is the different forms of exhibition. What differences and similarities in composition, for instance, can be identified between the audience that attends first- and those who attend subsequent-run pictures? In 1955 Smythe et al.[71] reported their study of the audience for first-run films; to date this study has not been replicated nor has there been a study conducted comparing first- to subsequent-run movie audiences. Similarly, research has, for the most part, failed to examine the audience for art films, cult films (e.g., The Rocky Horror Picture Show), and other specific film-types.[72] In fact, with the exception of governmentally sponsored research on pornography,[73] few investigations have sought to study and describe the audiences for specific types of films. A third film context on which little audience research has been reported is the type of exhibition hall: e.g., drive-ins,[74] single screen, and multiplexes.

Thus, the argument presented here is that a multitude of contextual dimensions are in need of research attention. It should be noted that such research need not -- and ought not -- be constrained to an asymmetric perspective (i.e., what does the context "do" to the audience?). Rather, a transactional research design may prove to be a richer and more meaningful point of view. Here we would ask questions such as: How does the audience go about constructing its own film context? How does the audience's

construction interface with an existing (e.g., physical) context?

Public Preference for Movie-Types

The third research issue concerns the public's taste in movies. What kinds of films does the public enjoy? Why? How are film preferences developed? Why do tastes and preferences for various types of films change?

Unlike the two research issues presented above, a good deal of research attention has been directed toward uncovering people's preferences for various story-types.[75] However, the methods used to discern taste preferences by researchers in this area tend to be unreliable and the coding categories non-comparable (thereby making trend analyses, for instance, impossible). One thing, at least, is abundantly clear: the public is very familiar with the many labels assigned to film-types (e.g., mystery, science fiction, musical, comedy) and has little trouble identifying their favorites and least favorites. The problem for researchers comes in interpreting the meaning that various individuals attach to these various labels and understanding the discriminations people make between the labels (e.g., what is the difference between films classified as thrillers, mysteries, and suspense?).

The problem of sorting-out film-type labels into meaningful, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive categories has been pointed out by other researchers. Smythe et al., for instance, note that "there is...a presumptive fuzziness (in the psychological and semantic sense of validity) in the meaning of names given program types by the respondents."[76] Their study used open-ended questions

to determine film-type preferences. On the other hand, Lazarsfeld pointed out that if movie types were precoded (close-ended response options), experimental work and conceptual clarification were also needed:

> If we ask, "What type of movie do you like best?" the answers depend upon the way the movie types are classified and upon the respondents' understanding of the terms we are using.[77]

An understanding of the public's preference for different types of films is important insofar as it would help scholars in developing a theory of the motives for movie-going. Further, such information might also find application in the measurement of attitudes toward motion pictures (discussed below). Here it can be noted that content analysis, coupled with such tools as the semantic differential and multidimensional scaling, suggest a method which could be used to clarify how the audience conceptualizes film-types.

Attitude Toward Motion Pictures

As was briefly noted earlier, one plausible explanation for the dramatic decline in weekly film admissions is that a shift in movie-goers' attitude toward the medium has occurred. In general, one clear purpose and use of attitude measurement is that of predicting behavior.[78] Such predictions may be advanced through an understanding of the characteristics and values individuals expect to find, or associate with, when engaging in a particular activity (e.g., movie attendance). However, systematic study of people's

attitudes toward movies has been scant; a much greater research emphasis has been placed on the flip-side of the attitude coin (i.e., studies which ask "What do movies do to patrons?").[79]

The few attitude-toward-movies studies that have been reported, when placed in a historical context, show an unmistakable trend. Based on the extant literature, the public's attitude toward movies can be seen as shifting from a highly favorable one as reported by Williams in 1933, to a more tepid response as was documented by Patel's 1952 study and Panda and Kanungo's 1962 report, and finally, to Austin's (1981) finding of a somewhat unfavorable attitude.[80] The shift in attitudinal direction since the earliest research study to the most recent parallels the declining number of admissions over the years. While acknowledging the dangers of ex post facto explanations, the intuitive appeal and face validity of such an interpretation cannot be ignored. That is, this parallel shift may suggest that movie attendance has declined because of an increasingly unfavorable attitude toward films.[81] The causes for this change in attitude direction can only be speculated on, unfortunately, since research was not performed on this topic.

Several related attitude research directions may also be briefly identified here. First, and most urgently, construction of a reliable, valid, and contemporary movie attitude scale is needed. Such a scale should be developed and designed keeping in mind the multidimensional aspects of attitude.[82] A second area in need of investigation is that of discovering the process of formation and change of attitude toward movies. How many exposures to

the medium are required before an individual forms a firm attitude? What variables might affect a shift in this attitude? How does the social context affect attitude formation and change? Furthermore, the well-documented observation that interpersonal contact affects individual's choice of movie,[83] as well as their evaluation of movies,[84] raises the question: What role does interpersonal influence play in affecting attitude toward films?

A third direction for future attitude research has to do with a drawback to all of the existing attitude toward movies research. All of these studies have used either high school or college students as respondents. The issue of external (especially population) validity, and the limitations to the results gathered with samples composed of such individuals -- in addition to factors such as the demand characteristics of the setting in which the scales were administered -- are obvious. While it can be argued that since the majority of filmgoers fall within the high school-college age bracket,[85] therefore "for film research, the college student may be more representative than students used in other research,"[86] this overlooks the importance of understanding the entire population's attitude toward the medium (especially non-movie-goers and infrequent movie goers). Thus, attitude measurement performed on samples having a greater range of stratification and demographic attributes is needed.

IV: Conclusions

Presented in this paper was (1) a rationale for the systematic study of the film audience, (2) explanations why both the industry

and social science community have neglected film audience research, as well as the validity of these explanations, and (3) four theoretically important topics for future research in this field. In general it can be concluded that the reasons typically offered for the lack of film audience research are, at best, weak. Further, by viewing the four topics for further research as heuristic, one can see that much work needs to be done.

Methodologically, the domain of film audience research demands that a variety of approaches and tools be used. It should be italicized that in going about the business of performing research and building theory in this area, the researcher must actively avoid the temptation to become married to either a particular tool or design since no one research method is without its drawbacks. As Webb et al., state: "...the issue is not choosing among individual methods. Rather it is the necessity for a multiple operationalism, a collection of methods combined to avoid sharing the same weaknessesses."[87] Thus, the often presented choice between quantitative and qualitative approaches, for instance, can be seen for what it is: a spurious, artificial, constraint externally imposed. Just as number-crunching is not <u>the</u> answer, the same can be said for the qualitative perspective.

Perhaps the strongest methodological argument to be advanced here is that film audience researchers must get out of the classroom and the laboratory and into the field. The phenomenon of interest needs to be studied in the richness of its natural environment. This environment, as was suggested earlier, needs to

be understood for its own sake as well as to assist researchers in the interpretation and explanation of data gathered outside of the natural context. All too often researchers have relied on the comfort and convenience of the sterile classroom or the mail or telephone survey. Such research settings, far removed from where the phenomenon under investigation occurs, limit the external validity of the research results; and, more important, usually offer only an incomplete (or, worse, distorted) image of the behavior or the motives for behavior.

Earlier it was noted that most people, when asked how important a number of variables were to their most recent movie attendance, report that the film's theme or plot was the most important variable. In and of itself this finding is probably not too surprising; it is also, however, illogical. People might be expected to refer to film content as the key determinant in their attendance decision ex post facto. However, one cannot possibly have first-hand knowledge of a film's plot prior to actually viewing the film itself. Thus, the influence of "plot" in drawing attention to and attendance at a given film is probably embedded in and dependent upon other variables (e.g., interpersonal interaction, reading of reviews, viewing and reading advertisements, seeing trailers, etc.). Field studies -- interviews with patrons in line, before they see the picture they are queued up for -- might, for instance, find a decrease in the frequency with which the film's plot is mentioned as an important variable in the attendance decision process. Moreover, personal

interviews with patrons would provide the opportunity to follow-up and probe a response such as "theme/plot" to ascertain the underlying means by which patrons gained their perception of film content (unlike the printed survey). In short, the application of multiple methodologies, under a variety of conditions, all directed at understanding a given aspect of the movie audience, would tend to increase the meaningfulness of the data gathered.

The final paragraphs of this paper focus on theory vis-à-vis film audience research. At present, it is clear, we not only find ourselves with little audience research per se, but also devoid of theory. The cause(s) of this present state of affairs could be speculated on (it may be, for instance, a case of reciprocal causation), but the value to be derived from such speculation may not be so compelling as to warrant the effort. Moreover, regardless of the precise reason(s) for the atheoretical state of film audience research, the consequences are abundantly lucid. Without the guidance of theory, research falls prey to justifiable and well-deserved criticism aimed at its meaninglessness and unconnectedness.[88] The need for theoretical underpinnings is urgent.

Rather than taking, for instance, the shotgun empiricism approach to research, film audience investigators must begin by using existing theory as a means to develop film audience theory. An example will help to underscore and clarify this point. One might reasonably pose the question: What accounts for the vast, immediate, popularity of some films, such as Raiders of the Lost Ark, as compared to the less immediate popularity of a film such

as Breaking Away? Another way of asking this same question would be: Why do some films "catch on" with the public so quickly, others more slowly, and others not at all? The scholar seeking an answer to this question might fruitfully draw research hypotheses and design considerations from the literature of at least two theories: diffusion of innovations and Expectancy X Value. The point is not simply to seek confirmation of any theory but rather to "check the fit" and then go about designing follow-up studies to "improve the fit" using, as appropriate, tenets of the same theory or hypotheses drawn from other existing or developing theories.

Finally, the argument and example offered above was not presented to suggest that film researchers become the beggars of social science: i.e., taking theoretical handouts from other disciplines. Instead, what is being proposed is that film audience research apply the available literature and evidence as a lens through which to focus on the properties of the film audience. This approach allows film scholars to determine what is truly unique to the field and what is shared with other disciplines. From this point the development of a theory of film audience can begin.

[1]This is not to suggest that all -- or any -- such works are necessarily definitive nor that such research is no longer needed.

[2]Leo Handel, "This Thing Called Audience Research," Hollywood Reporter, 1946 Anniversary Edition, unpaginated.

[3]Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "Audience Research in the Movie Field," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 254 (November 1947): 162.

[4]Leo A. Handel, "Hollywood Market Research," The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television 7 (Spring 1953): 310.

[5]Thomas Simonet, "Industry," Film Comment 14 (January-February 1978): 72.

[6]Thomas H. Guback, "Are We Looking at the Right Things in Film?", paper presented at the Society for Cinema Studies Convention, Philadelphia, PA., March 1978. For a related discussion of this perspective see Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, "Capitalism, Communication and Class Relations," in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott (Eds.), Mass Communication and Society (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977), pp. 12-43.

[7]Bruce A. Austin, "Film Audience Research, 1960-1980: An Annotated Bibliography," Journal of Popular Film and Television 8 (1980, no.2): 53-60, and Bruce A. Austin, "Film Audience Research, 1960-1980: An Update," Journal of Popular Film and Television 8 (Winter 1981): 57-59.

[8]One might wish to compare the simple frequency of movie audience studies with, for example, those of a much more recent medium, television. If, for instance, one wishes to assess the body of literature pertaining to television and motion pictures vis-a-vis their audiences, and could only use one book, the point regarding the depth and breadth of knowledge concerning film audience research is made abundantly clear. For TV audience research perhaps the most current and comprehensive book one would choose to consult would be George Comstock et al.'s Television and Human Behavior (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) in which one would find 510 pages of text surveying more than 2500 research reports. In contrast, the most current film audience research book is Leo A. Handel's Hollywood Looks

at Its Audience (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), containing 227 pages of text and fewer than 100 references.

Some would maintain that this comparison between the contemporary TV research and the historical research on film audiences is spurious and argue that the appropriate comparison to Comstock et al. would be the 1933 series of Payne Fund studies (which were conducted, it would be asserted, at a time when movie-going stood in the same relationship to society as TV does presently). While I am inclined to somewhat agree with this argument, three items prevent complete endorsement. First, it is important to note (as it will be later in the text) that the Payne Fund studies were initiated by William Short, a man with an ax to grind (see Garth Jowett, Film: The Democratic Art [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976], p. 231, footnote 48). Second, the Payne Fund studies resulted in 12 volumes -- certainly not an overwhelming number of researches. Third, methodological weakness abound in these works, especially the content analyses.

[9]See Gordon Hendricks, "The History of the Kinetoscope," in Tino Balio (Ed.), The American Film Industry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 38-39.

[10]Richard Gertner (Ed.), Motion Pictures Almanac 1981 (New York: Quigley Publishing Co., 1981), p. 30A.

[11]Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce, 1970 Census of Population, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 42.

[12]Christopher H. Sterling and Timothy R. Haight, The Mass Media (New York: Praeger, 1978), p. 352.

[13]L. L. Thurstone ("A Scale for Measuring Attitude Toward the Movies," Journal of Educational Research 22 [September 1930]: 89-94) reported his 40-item scale for measuring attitudes toward movies. The focus of his study was the development of an attitude assessment measure rather than its results; as a matter of fact, in this work the procedures employed for developing and utilizing this scale are presented but not the results of its implementation.

[14]J. Harold Williams ("Attitudes of College Students Toward Motion Pictures," School and Society 38 [August 12, 1933]: 222-224) used Thurstone's scale and concluded that his sample, "on the whole, is more favorably than unfavorably disposed toward moving pictures; and that a large proportion of them exhibit extremely favorable attitudes" (p. 223).

[15]Bureau of the Census, op. cit., p. 42.

[16]Reported in Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Theories of Mass Communication, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1975), p. 59.

[17]For a discussion of this point, as well as presentation of the most current data, see Bruce A. Austin, "Attitudes Toward Motion Pictures Among College Students," unpublished paper, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, February 1981.

[18]I. C. Jarvie, Movies and Society (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 113.

[19]All box office figures reported represent domestic (U. S. and Canada) film rentals, not admissions. See "All-Time Rental Champs," Variety, May 13, 1981, pp. 49 ff.

[20]One (limited in scope, methodology, and sample) study has been conducted on Star Wars' audience: James W. Arnold and Lennox Samuels, "Star Wars and its Audience," paper presented at the Popular Culture Association Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 1978.

[21]Quoted in Handel, Hollywood Looks at Its Audience, op. cit., p. 93. Jowett (Film, op. cit., p. x) notes: "The continued reluctance of the motion picture industry to give its support to any form of research in the past now means that reliable industry statistics, and other relevant information, are generally not available. Thus the film historian is forced to fall back upon unsubstantiated material, or imprecise approximations."

[22]Lee C. Garrison, "The Needs of Motion Picture Audiences," California Management Review 15 (Winter 1972): 148-149.

[23]Mae D. Heuttig, "The Motion Picture Industry Today," in Balio, op. cit., p. 229.

[24]Freeman Lincoln, "The Comeback of the Movies," in Balio, op. cit., p. 372, emphasis added.

[25]It should be noted that Hollywood's seeming lack of interest in research is not limited to only audiences. Tino Balio has written that technical innovations (e.g., sound, color, and various wide-screen processes) "were developed and perfected by either minor companies or individuals working outside of the mainstream of the industry." See "Retrenchment, Reappraisal, and Reorganization: 1948 --," in Balio, op. cit., p. 321.

[26]Terry Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture Through 1925 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), p.450.

[27]Benjamin B. Hampton, History of the American Film Industry from its Beginnings to 1931 (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p. 46.

[28]See Bob Thomas, King Cohn: The Life and Times of Harry Cohn (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), pp. 141-142.

[29]Director Frank Capra recalled that Sennett ascertained the viability of his gag writers' schticks by his own reaction to them: "When he laughed, the audience was going to laugh. It was a real litmus test." See "Dialogue on Film: Frank Capra," American Film 4 (October 1978): 40.

[30]Simonet, "Industry," op. cit., p. 72.

[31]Hampton, for instance, reports that Adolph Zukor of Paramount was most prescient: he had "an amazing flair for sensing audience reactions long before the movie audiences themselves knew what they wanted." See Hampton, History of the American Film Industry, op. cit., p. 154.

[32]Ibid., pp. 338-339.

[33]Lewis Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History (New York: Teachers College Press, 1939), p. 296.

[34]Ibid., pp. 295-296.

[35]Hampton, History of the American Film Industry, op. cit., pp.311-312.

[36]Ramsaye noted in his preface that: "The innumerable and complex racial, political, and geographical relations and reactions in which

the screen has been importantly involved are yet to be explored. Largely the psychology of the motion picture is still awaiting an investigator." See Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, op. cit., p.vii.

[37]C. A. Palmer, "Commercial Practices in Audience Analysis," Journal of the University Film Association 6 (Spring 1954): 9.

[38]Lazarsfeld, "Audience Research in the Movie Field," op. cit., p.162. See also Jarvie, Movies and Society op. cit., pp. 5-6 and David Reisman, "Movies and Audiences," American Quarterly 4 (1952): 195-202.

[39]Handel, Hollywood Looks at Its Audience, op. cit., pp. 3-4. Robert W. Chambers ("Need for Statistical Research," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 254 [November 1947]: 169) offers a related explanation "To explain this factual deficiency . . . the rapid growth of the industry has prevented it from taking a statistical inventory."

[40]Jarvie, Movies and Society, op. cit., p. 108.

[41]For example anti-trust and monopoly rulings.

[42]Handel, "Hollywood Market Research," op. cit., p. 304. Richard Dyer MacCann ("Film Scholarship: Dead or Alive?" Journal of the University Film Association 28 [Winter 1976]: 5) notes: "the urge to construct scientific explanations for art naturally turns attention away from questions of quality." He goes on to ask: "Why don't the euphoric young semiologists who want to codify 'every square inch of the screen image' settle down and do a little honest audience research on what those codes really mean to various living viewers?"

[43]Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "Foreward" in Handel, Hollywood Looks at Its Audience op. cit., p. xii.

[44]Handel, "Hollywood Market Research," op. cit., p. 304.

[45]Ibid., pp. 308-309.

[46]Ibid,, p. 305.

[47]Lazarfeld, "Foreward," op. cit., p. xii. This argument has managed to linger on to the present. Most recently, Garth Jowett and James M. Linton have written (Movies as Mass Communication [Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980], p. 27): ". . . each movie, while mass produced, is essentially a unique commodity" (emphasis is original).

[48]As will be detailed later, this has an important implication for the independent scholar as well.

[49]David Lees and Stan Berkowitz, The Movie Business (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), p. 117.

[50]Ibid., p. 144.

[51]Denis McQuail (Ed.), Sociology of Mass Communications (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 117. Fearing's article originally appeared in Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 254 (November 1947): 70-79.

[52]Sterling and Haight, The Mass Media, op. cit., pp. 352-356.

[53]Jowett, Film, op. cit.

[54]Jowett (Film, ibid., pp. 386-387) discusses Marvin E. Olsen's study ("Motion Picture Attendance and Social Isolation," Sociological Quarterly 1 [April 1960]: 107-116) in which Olsen reported support for the hypothesis that one motive for movie attendance is that people use movies as a social substitute. What Jowett does not report is that five years after Olsen's study was published Olsen found and reported that a methodological error invalidated the major finding of the original study (see Marvin E. Olsen, "Correction of 'Motion Picture Attendance and Social Isolation,'" Sociological Quarterly 6 [Spring 1965]: 19).

[55]Handel, Hollywood Looks at Its Audience, op. cit. See also the 12 volumes reporting the Payne Fund studies which were published in 1933.

[56]Jarvie, Movies and Society, op. cit., p. 11. Jowett and Linton (Movies as Mass Communication, op. cit., p. 28) have written: ". . . data from, and even the very existence and nature of, the industry's research on their product is treated as secretively as the data on various facets of the industry." Lees and Berkowitz (The Movie Business,

op. cit., p. ix) assert that "the film business, in which illusion is so important, likes to conceal its day-to-day realities." Sterling and Haight (The Mass Media, op. cit., p. 354) state: "While many studies have been done on the motion picture audience, very little of such information has been released to the public. Hollywood appears to distrust statistics -- and to show an interest in them only when times are bad."

[57]Lazarsfeld, "Audience Research in the Movie Field," op. cit., p.162.

[58]For a discussion of recent trends in research conducted by the film industry see Thomas Simonet, "Market Research: Beyond the Fanny of the Cohn," Film Comment 16 (January-February 1980): 66-69.

[59]Lazarsfeld, "Forward," op. cit., p. xii. MacCann ("Film Scholarship," op. cit., p. 5) has written: "the methods of science -- at least if one thinks in terms of the familiar combination of hypothesis and experiment -- must usually be devoted to situations of great similarity. When a work or event can be replicated, something is proved. But of course a work of art, by definition, is unique."

[60]See Lazarfeld, "Foreward," op. cit., p. xii and Jeremy Tunstall, The Media are American (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 204-206.

[61]Handel, "Hollywood Market Research," op. cit., p. 308

[62]Handel, "Hollywood Looks at Its Audience, op. cit., p. 5.

[63]Johnson was pressing for research on American movie-goers and nonmovie-goers.

[64]Handel, "Hollywood Market Research," op. cit., p. 308.

[65]Jarvie, Movies and Society, op. cit., p. 6. Jarvie also states (p. 11) that research is frustrated by the intermittent flow of films (both output by the producers and their exhibition) and the film's lack of pervasiveness as compared to other media.

[66]See for instance: Olivia Howard Dunbar, "The Lure of the Films," Harper's Weekly, January 18, 1913, pp. 20-22; Walter Prichard Eaton,

"The Menace of the Movies," American Magazine, September 1913, pp. 55-60; Joseph R. Fulk, "The Effect on Education and Morals of the Moving-Picture Shows," Proceedings of the National Education Association Annual Meeting, 1912, pp. 456-461; William A. McKeever, "The Moving Picture: A Primary School for Criminals," Good Housekeeping, August 19, 1910, pp. 184-186; Harmon B. Stephens, "The Relationship of the Motion Picture to Changing Moral Standards," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (November 1929): 151-157.

[67]Robert Sklar, Movie-Made America (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 134.

[68]See Fredric Stuart, "The Effects of Television on the Motion Picture and Radio Industries," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1960 (reprinted by Arno Press, 1976) and "Study Blames TV for Theatre Drop," Broadcasting, February 3, 1958, p. 58.

[69]See Bruce A. Austin, "Film Attendance: Why College Students Chose to See Their Most Recent Film," Journal of Popular Film and Television 9 (Spring 1981): 43-49; Bruce A. Austin, "M.P.A.A. Rating Influence on Stated Likelihood of High School Student Film Attendance: A Test of Reactance Theory," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1981; Los Angeles Times, A Look at Southern California Movie-Going (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times, 1972); Robert Silvey and Judy Kenyon, "Why You Go to the Pictures," Films and Filming 11 (June 1965): 4-5, 36.

[70]See for example Los Angeles Times, A Look at Southern California Movie-Going, op. cit. which found that nearly three-quarters (73%) of its respondents (teenagers and adults) reported they had decided to see a particular picture before deciding to go to the movies, rather than the other way around (i.e., deciding to go to the movies before deciding which film to see); William Fadiman (Hollywood Now [London: Thames and Hudson], 1973), among others, has noted that the concept of movie-going has shifted substantially from a habitual behavior to one bearing more special significance.

[71]Dallas W. Smythe, John R. Gregory, Alvin Ostrin, Oliver R. Colvin, and William Moroney, "Portrait of a First-Run Audience," The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television 9 (Summer 1955): 390-409.

[72]A limited number of studies has been conducted on these topics. See for instance: Dallas W. Smythe, Parker B. Lusk, and Charles A. Lewis, "Portrait of an Art-Theater Audience," The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television 8 (Fall 1953): 28-50; Bruce A. Austin, "Portrait of a Cult Film Audience: The Rocky Horror Picture Show," Journal of Communication 31 (Spring 1981): 43-54; Daniel J. Klenow and Jeffrey L. Crane, "Selected Characteristics of the X-Rated Movie Audience: Toward a National Profile of the Recidivist," Sociological Symposium 20 (Fall 1977): 73-83.

[73]See the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), as well as the Technical Reports of this Commission published by the U.S. Government Printing Office.

[74]See Steuart H. Britt, "What is the Nature of the Drive-In Theater Audience?," Media/scope 4 (June 1960): 100-102.

[75]See for instance: Vernon E. Augustin, "Moving Picture Preferences," Journal of Delinquency 7 (1927): 206-209; Alice Miller Mitchell, "Movies Children Like," Survey 63 (November 15, 1929): 213-215; Harold E. Jones and Herbert S. Conrad, "Rural Preferences in Motion Pictures," Journal of Social Psychology 1 (1930): 419-423; W. D. Wall and E. M. Smith, "The Film Choices of Adolescents," British Journal of Educational Psychology 19 (June 1949): 121-136; W. J. Scott, Reading, Film and Radio Tastes of High School Boys and Girls (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Educational Research Series No. 28 [New Zealand: Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd., 1947]), Chapter III, pp. 112-145.

[76]Smythe et al., "Portrait of a First-Run Audience," op. cit., p. 398.

[77]Lazarsfeld; "Audience Research in the Movie Field," op.cit., p. 166.

[78]See Charles R. Tittle and Richard J. Hill, "Attitude Measurement and Prediction of Behavior: An Evaluation of the Conditions and Measurement Techniques," Sociometry 30 (1967): 199-213. It should be noted that the attitude-causes-behavior position is not endorsed by all researchers. Daryl J. Bem ("Self-Perception Theory," in Leonard Berkowitz [Ed.], Advances in Experimental Social Psychology,

vol. 6 [New York: Academic Press, 1972]) has discussed the hypothesis that behaviors cause attitudes while Herbert C. Kelman ("Attitudes are Alive and Well and Gainfully Employed in the Sphere of Action", American Psychologist 29 [May 1974]: 310-324) has examined the reciprocal causation hypothesis (i.e., attitudes cause behaviors and behaviors cause attitudes).

[79]See for instance: J. E. Hulett, "Estimating the Net Effect of a Commercial Motion Picture Upon the Trend of Local Public Opinion," American Sociological Review 14 (April 1949): 263-275; Russell Middleton, "Ethnic Prejudice and Susceptibility to Persuasion," American Sociological Review 25 (October 1960): 679-686; Douglas Cameron Moore, "A Study of the Influence of the Film, The Birth of a Nation, on Attitudes of Selected High School White Students Toward Negroes," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1971; Ruth Peterson and L. L. Thurstone, Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933); Louise Raths and Frank N. Trager, "Public Opinion and 'Crossfire'," Journal of Educational Sociology 21 (February 1948): 345-368; Irwin C. Rosen, "The Effect of the Motion Picture 'Gentleman's Agreement' on Attitudes Toward Jews," Journal of Psychology 26 (October 1948): 525-536.

[80]J. Harold Williams, "Attitudes of College Students Toward Motion Pictures," op. cit.; A. S. Patel, "Attitudes of Adolescent Pupils Toward Cinema Films," Journal of Education and Psychology 9 (1952): 225-230; K. C. Panda and R. N. Kanungo, "A Study of Indian Students' Attitudes Towards the Motion Pictures," Journal of Social Psychology 57(June 1962): 23-31; Bruce A. Austin, "Attitudes Toward Motion Pictures Among College Students," op. cit. For a review and summary of the attitude toward movies research see Bruce A. Austin, "People's Attitude Toward Motion Pictures," in Sari Thomas (Ed.), Film/Culture: Explorations of Cinema in its Social Context (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1982, forthcoming).

[81]For a discussion of three other possible explanations for this parallel shift see Austin, "Attitudes Toward Motion Pictures Among College Students," op. cit.

[82]For further discussion on this point see Bruce A. Austin, "A Factor Analytic Study of Attitudes Toward Motion Pictures," Journal of Social Psychology, in press.

[83]See for instance: Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955); Austin, "Film Attendance: Why College Students Chose to See Their Most Recent Film," op. cit.; Austin, "M.P.A.A. Rating Influence on Stated Likelihood of High School Student Film Attendance," op. cit.; Thomas O'Guinn, "The Audience's Choice: Movie Selection and Word of Mouth," paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1981.

[84]Michael H. Burzynski and Dewey J. Bayer, "The Effect of Positive and Negative Prior Information on Motion Picture Appreciation," Journal of Social Psychology 101 (April 1977): 215-218.

[85]Research presented in the early 1970s showed that 18-to-29-year-olds made up fully 48% of the movie-going public (National Association of Theatre Owners, Encyclopedia of Exhibition 1976 [New York: National Association of Theatre Owners, 1976]). More recently, Richard Gertner (Ed.) (Motion Picture Almanac 1980 [New York: Quigley Publishing Co., 1980], p. 32A) reports that 58% of the total 1977 admissions were accounted for by 16-to-29-year-olds. Moreover, individuals with at least some college education comprised both the largest and most frequent movie-going aggregate.

[86]William R. Elliott and William J. Schenk-Hamlin, "Film, Politics and the Press: The Influence of 'All the President's Men,'" Journalism Quarterly 56 (Autumn 1979), p. 553.

[87]Eugene J. Webb, Donald T. Campbell, Richard D. Schwartz, and Lee Sechrest, Unobtrusive Measures (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), pp. 1-2.

[88]For additional discussion of this point see Calvin Pryluck, "'There's Nothing So Practical as a Good Theory'," AFI Education Newsletter 5 (September-October 1981): 1-2. However, for a discussion of the usefulness and necessity of basic descriptive and interpretational research, especially as applied to theory-building, see Leonard C. Hawes, "Alternative Theoretical Bases: Toward a Presuppositional Critique," Communication Quarterly 25 (Winter 1977): 63-68.